

DYSPRAXIA WHAT IS IT?

The Dyspraxia Foundation describes dyspraxia (also called DCD- Developmental co-ordination disorder) as '**an impairment or immaturity of the organisation of movement**'. There may also be problems to do with language, perception and thought.

Research has shown that between five and ten per cent of the population are dyspraxic and that the condition can be diagnosed from early years through to adulthood.



Useful websites:

<https://dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk/dyspraxia-children/>

<http://www.movementmattersuk.org>

WHAT ARE THE ASSOCIATED DIFFICULTIES?

The following sub-headings are words and phrases that you will hear being used at school when dyspraxia is being discussed.

Gross motor skills

A dyspraxic child often appears to be clumsy, bumping into people and objects. They will have difficulty in judging distances and the position of objects in space, so find ball games particularly hard. They need to be watched carefully when climbing on playground equipment because they often have no sense of danger. Their movements appear to be uncoordinated, particularly when running, jumping, hopping or riding a bike.

Fine motor skills

A dyspraxic child will sometimes appear to be a messy eater because they have difficulty in controlling their eating utensils. They are often unsure of which hand to use and may change hands in the middle of an activity. Their use of pencils, crayons, scissors, puzzles and simple construction toys is very immature. They have difficulty in copying shapes and pictures.

Language skills

Some dyspraxic children have limited communication skills but a good understanding of language. They may have difficulty producing some speech sounds and be unable to communicate their ideas easily. They find it confusing if they are given too much verbal information at a time because they take longer to process it and are rarely able to make immediate responses. They have difficulty in following more than one instruction at a time. They find it hard to put information in order and reproduce it verbally, which affects their ability to answer questions in the classroom.

Social skills

A dyspraxic child can often be very excitable and have a loud and high-pitched voice. They may find it difficult to adapt to a structured school routine and have limited concentration and poor listening skills. They might not enjoy cooperative, imaginative play (eg. the home corner, dressing up) and find it difficult to make friends. They may be easily upset and can have temper tantrums. This kind of behaviour annoys other children, affecting friendships. They may often appear to be rough and aggressive because they have difficulty controlling his movements.

How this may be observed in the classroom:

- *Games lessons are often difficult* - the child has difficulty with activities that involve running, hopping, jumping, skipping, catching/batting/kicking balls, climbing onto and off apparatus or climbing bars. Has difficulty with team games, understanding and remembering rules, listening to instructions
- *Handwriting difficulties* - both with formation of letters as well as speed. Work appears messy. Has difficulty keeping up in class, completing work, only able to write a few lines or sentences. Hand becomes easily tired.
- *Difficulty using classroom equipment* – includes equipment such as rulers, scissors, compasses, protractors etc
- *Slow at dressing/undressing* - particularly changing for games/PE, tying shoe laces, tie, doing up buttons, putting on coats
- *Difficulty sitting still* - may wonder around the classroom or move around on seat. Fidgets and may disturb others.
- *Difficulty keeping to own space* - work spreads out, PE/games kit spread over area
- *Poor concentration skills* - has difficulty focusing on an activity or only manages to stay on task for a short time
- *Poor organisation skills* – forgets to take homework/books/letters home or bring back to school,

generally messy, loses items, poor planning for stories/essays. Has problems adapting to a structured school routine or new school year

- *Falls and trips over* - more so than other children

- *Poor spatial awareness* - knocks into objects in the classroom, knocks over items on the table or bumps into people

- *Poor short term memory* - difficulty remembering or following instructions, forgets what to do for homework, difficulty copying from the board or with dictation

- *Poor stamina* - gets easily tired and frustrated with themselves

- *Social difficulties* - often loners, have problems with forming relationships and can appear isolated in a class group. Takes spoken word literally

- *Emotional* - easily distressed

- *Other difficulties* - often find maths difficult. The child may report physical symptoms - migraines, headaches, feeling sick

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I SUSPECT SOMETHING IS WRONG?

Dyspraxia is a medical diagnosis and is usually made by paediatricians, physiotherapists and occupational therapists. If you or your child's teacher suspects that your child may have dyspraxia, you can ask for a referral through your family doctor. If your child has had communication difficulties and has been receiving speech and language therapy then the speech and language therapist may suggest a referral.

Do explain your concerns to your child's class teacher and to the special educational needs coordinator, as she will be asked to contribute to any assessment made by other professionals.

HOW TEACHERS HELP AT SCHOOL...

Teachers help by

- giving clear, simple instructions and constant reminders both spoken and written
- providing a reasonably quiet working environment
- organising activities to develop listening and attention skills (eg. sound tapes)
- encouraging children to present ideas using ICT (eg. tape recorder, word-processor)

- incorporating some suggested motor-coordination exercises into a PE programme or within the school day, such as 'Fun Fit'.
- organising literacy and numeracy games and activities which require turn-taking
- practicing a range of sequencing activities (pictorial activity/story sequences, word and sentence sequences, days/months/number sequences)
- developing role-play and drama activities including the use of finger and hand puppets
- helping children organise their written work by using writing frames (pre-prepared sheets)

HOW YOU CAN HELP AT HOME...

You can help at home by

- giving clear, simple instructions with constant reminders - but don't nag!
- practicing the suggested motor-coordination exercises regularly
- encouraging your child to take part in regular sporting activities out of school
- praising every effort, successful achievement and learning of new skills
- encouraging your child to play games requiring cooperation and turn-taking
- encouraging play using large constructional toys such as Mega Blocks, Lego Duplo and Play Doh
- practicing tracking activities such as mazes, dot to dot, tracing and letter shapes
- teaching your child self-help skills such as feeding, dressing and packing and unpacking his school bag.